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RUSSIAN MISRULE.

OUTRAGES

COMMITTED BY THE

RUSSIAN GOVERNMENT

IN

POLAND

AGAINST

PROPERTY, LIBERTY, RELIGION,

AND

LANGUAGE.

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1877.

RUSSIAN MISRULE.

Turkey is reproached for not having kept her promises ; but Russia does not keep hers. To say nothing of her previous treaty engagements toward the Poles, the Russian Government repeatedly declared during the insurrection of 1863 (viz., Memorandum of the Russian Cabinet of the 7th September, 1863; Rescript of the Emperor to the Grand Duke Constantine of the 19th (31st) October, 1863) that after the insurrection should have been suppressed, and the guilty punished, nothing should be changed in the political condition of Poland.

In contradiction to its promises, the Government of the Czar has since 1864 inaugurated in Poland a system of oppression and Russification of which history shows no example. The autonomy guaranteed by treaties to the kingdom of Poland has been entirely destroyed. All the central institutions of administration, of justice, and of public instruction have been suppressed at Warsaw and transferred to St. Petersburg. Even the title of Viceroy and Lieutenant of the Kingdom has been suppressed since the death of Count Berg. All the higher Polish functionaries and most of the lower have been dismissed, and replaced by Russians. Thirteen years have elapsed since the insurrection; the Poles have not given any new cause for punishment; no disorders or resistance to the

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authorities have taken place anywhere in Poland; yet Russia does not cease to oppress and persecute the Polish nationality and religion.

ACTS OF OPPRESSION OF THE RUSSIAN GOVERNMENT IN
POLAND AGAINST PROPERTY.

Innumerable estates belonging to the Poles have been confiscated; Russia is the only Christian State where this cruel and odious practice still exists. In the ancient provinces of Poland (Lithuania, Volhynia, Podolia, &c.) the Polish and Catholic inhabitants are forbidden to acquire landed property, except by direct succession; they are forbidden to sell such property, to give it, or to leave it by will to Catholics or Poles. In such respects they are treated as outlaws. This naturally causes their property to be enormously depreciated, for there are as a rule very few Russians in the provinces in question, and those who do reside there possess but little capital. When a debtor becomes insolvent his estate is sold by auction, the result of which is that both he and his creditors are often ruined, for those best qualified to bid for the property being incapacitated by the law from purchasing, it is sold for a mere song. The ukase which first established this unheard-of measure is dated the 10th (22d) December, 1865, and it is in force to this day. Since the last insurrection a special contribution has been levied exclusively on the Polish and Catholic inhabitants of the ancient Polish provinces. It is mostly based on unjust and erroneous estimates, which were made during the state of siege in 1863-4.

The above are some of the most flagrant acts of injustice committed by the Russian Government in Poland; there are numerous others which seem invented for the especial purpose of checking the production, the industry, and the prosperity of Poland.

VIOLATION OF INDIVIDUAL LIBERTY AND ABSENCE OF
PERSONAL SECURITY.

It frequently happens in Poland that a man is arrested in his bed, imprisoned, and banished to Siberia without trial, simply because he is suspected or has been secretly informed against. Thousands of Poles have been banished in this manner; the practice is called "transportation by administrative decree," and all that is necessary in such cases is the decision of a governor or an order from the chief of the police at St. Petersburg.

AGAINST RELIGION.

A great number of churches in various parts of the country, especially in Lithuania and Ruthenia, have been closed and confiscated. The majority of the convents have been suppressed not only in the "Kingdom" (by ukase of the 8th November, 1865), but also in other parts of Poland. Various religious dioceses have also been suppressed by the Russian civil authorities, such as the diocese of Kamieniec (ukase of the 5th (17th) of June, 1866), that of Podlachia (ukase of the 10th (22d) of May, 1867), that of Minsk in Lithuania, and others. A great number of Polish bishops and prelates have been banished without trial to distant provinces of Russia, such as Monsignor Felinski, Archbishop

of Warsaw; Monsignor Rzewuski, Administrator of the Diocese of Warsaw; Monsignor Krasinski, Bishop of Wilna; Monsignor Kalinski, Bishop of Chelm, who died on the way to his place of banishment; Monsignor Lubiewski, Bishop of Augustovo, who also died under similar circumstances; the Bishops of Poltzk and Zytomir, Canon Domagalski. The last who has been so treated is Monsignor Kruszynski, Administrator of the Diocese of Zytomir (November, 1876). A pretended conversion was recently effected of the United Greeks of the diocese of Chelm to the official Church by means of corruption and violence, followed by military execution against the villages which remained faithful to their ancient belief; the inhabitants of several villages fled into the woods in order to escape from the brutality of the troops,* and a whole family was burnt alive by them. It is now stated in official documents that the conversion of the United Greeks in Poland has been accomplished, but the churches from which the priests who remained faithful to that religion have been expelled remain empty, and the parishioners, not being able to address themselves to the Roman Catholic clergy (who are forbidden under severe penalties from receiving them), are left entirely without religious instruction or consolation.

AGAINST THE POLISH LANGUAGE.

There are under the rule of Russia alone more than six millions of people whose native language is Polish; five-sixths of them, at least, know no other language. Yet even in the "Kingdom of Poland" the Polish language has been

* See despatch of Lieut.-Colonel Mansfield, Her Majesty's Consul at Warsaw, p. 9 *post*.

banished from all official transactions and replaced by the Russian in the public offices, courts of justice, &c. In all the schools—even the primary schools—instruction is given in the Russian language only. In the ancient provinces of Poland the Polish language is even more rigorously persecuted, and its expulsion from public affairs dates from an earlier period. It is forbidden under penalties to have Polish inscriptions over shops, to make out tradesmen's bills in Polish, or to address letters in that language; even the speaking of Polish is forbidden in all public places, such as cafés, restaurants, hotels, and railway stations (decrees and circular of General Potapoff, Governor-General of Lithuania, of the 22d March and the 9th of July, 1866). So foolish and monstrous an edict could not of course be carried out to the letter, but it still has the force of law, and to this day placards may be seen in various parts of Vilna (the capital of Lithuania) with the inscription, "It is forbidden to speak Polish here."

OBSTACLES TO EDUCATION.

Not only has the system of Russification disorganised and debased public instruction in Poland, but even in the Russian schools, the universities and scientific schools especially, a small number only of Polish students in proportion to the total number are admitted—usually 10 per cent. of the total number of students—without speaking of the other obstacles by which it is sought to prevent them from obtaining higher and special education.

At the very time when Russia was demanding autonomy for Bulgaria she was effacing the last trace of the national institutions of Poland. The judicial reform ordered by the

ukase of the Emperor Alexander of the 19th of February (3rd March), 1875, was introduced on the 1st (13th) of July, 1876. By this reform the Polish language was suppressed in the courts of justice; the Polish judges were all dismissed, and replaced by Russians from St. Petersburg, who do not know either the language or the customs of the country. And it is before these foreigners, and in a foreign language, that the inhabitants of the entire country must plead for property, for liberty, and for honour.

Such is the condition of a nation which has not done less for civilisation than the Slavs in Turkey, and whose national rights have been repeatedly guaranteed by European treaties.

RUSSIA. No. 1 (1877)

EXTRACT OF CORRESPONDENCE
RESPECTING THE
TREATMENT OF THE MEMBERS
OF THE
UNITED GREEK CHURCH IN RUSSIA.

Presented to the House of Commons by Command of Her Majesty, in pursuance of their Address dated March 5, 1877.

Lieutenant-Colonel Mansfield to Earl Granville.—(Received February 16.)

Warsaw, January, 29th, 1874.

My Lord,

IT is with regret that I have to report to your Lordship a renewal of disturbances in the districts inhabited by the United Greeks in the Governments of Siedlce and Lublin, resulting in bloodshed, loss of life, and the most barbarous treatment inflicted on the peasants.

In the year 1871, in my despatch dated September 21, and again in 1872, I had the honour to bring to your Lordship's notice the policy of the Russian Government in attempting to assimilate the practices and ritual of the United Greeks to the Oriental rite, and expunging various Latin usages imported into the United Greek ritual by the Synod of Zamosc, some 130 years since.

The present disturbances are the sequel of what I reported on those occasions, but are of an aggravated character.

Several months since various of the United Greek priests represented to M. Popiel, the Administrator of the Diocese of Chelm, that the measures of assimilation had been but partially carried out, and that those priests who had done so were exposed to the gravest difficulties, amounting almost to persecution, at the hands of the peasants.

M. Popiel applied to Count Tolstoi, who forwarded from St. Petersburg, within the last few weeks, a Circular enjoining the strictest uniformity in the abolition of organs and benches, the disuse of the rosary, the bell at the mass, chants in Polish, and many other details too numerous to be worth relating

Such of the priests as had not, or were not prepared to execute the recommendations of the Circular have been ejected from their cures. The number, however, is insignificant, as almost all had previously acquiesced in the views of the Government, and the nonconformists have been eliminated

As may be supposed, the peasants care nothing about the Synod of Zamosc, or about the purity and usages of the primitive Church, Oriental or otherwise, but they have a deep-rooted veneration for the usages in which they and their fathers have been brought up.

The operation of Count Tolstoi's Circular has been most disastrous; in some few villages the peasants have entirely abstained from frequenting the churches, but in many the priests have been ill-treated, one having been stoned to death.

The aid of the police and military has been called in; in one parish three peasants were killed and many wounded. Isolated Cossacks are waylaid and murdered by the peasants. In some of the conflicts the military have been roughly handled, stoned, wounded by scythes, bones broken, and contusions, more especially among the officers.

In the district of Minciéwicz the peasants surrounded the church, and defied the military to introduce the priest. The former, with their wives and children, were finally mastered and surrounded, and were given the option of signing a declaration accepting the priest; on their refusal, fifty blows with the "nagaika" (Cossack whip) were given to every adult man, twenty-five to every woman, and ten to every child, irrespective of age or sex; one woman, who was more vehement than the rest, receiving as much as one hundred.

There are many rumours of further barbarities, but I have confined myself to what I have been able to authenticate.

The prisons at Siedlce are full of recalcitrants, and as the accommodation is limited, large numbers are confined in yards and sheds—a most severe measure at this season in this climate.

The proprietors and land-stewards are quitting their estates, as the peasants solicit protection and assistance, which it is impossible to afford, and, if given, would only compromise the individual.

It is much to be regretted that the peasants should have resorted to violence. A total abstention from the churches would hardly have been resented by the Government, and it is possible that the latter might have suspended the

alterations on seeing a passive resistance on the part of the population.

It is stated that the above circumstances have created so painful an impression on the authorities at St. Petersburg, more especially in the midst of the marriage festivities, that instructions have been forwarded to suspend all immediate action; but up to three days since, the peasants imprisoned at Siedlce had not been set at liberty

I have, &c.,

(Signed)

C. E. MANSFIELD.

